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## CHEERS & JEERS

# Rhode Island can do small part against genocide

**CHEERS** to state legislators and officials who propose divesting from companies with ties to Sudan, Africa's largest country, where more than 200,000 people have been killed by genocide and another 2.5 million people have been left homeless.

Last week, several state legislators, including sponsor Rep. Joseph Almeida, D-Providence, and General Treasurer Frank Caprio introduced legislation targeting Sudan divestment.

Brown University and the city of Providence already have agreed to divest from Sudan; Rhode Island is one of more than 20 other states considering or already committed to joining them.

Experts say the Sudanese government, which relies heavily on foreign investment, has shown a historic responsiveness to economic pressure. That's just what institutions and governments hope to accomplish by targeting companies that are helping support the Sudanese military and militias trying to wipe out the non-Arab population of Darfur.

Our state may be small, but it has an important role to play in pressuring the Sudanese government to stop the killing and restore peace in that troubled region.

**CHEERS** to a proposal to protect pets that may become targets in abusive relationships.

A bill sponsored by state Rep. Peter Lewiss, D-Westerly, would allow state judges to order an alleged abuser to keep away from the victim's pets or any animals owned by children in the household.

Threats against family pets can deter someone from leaving an abusive relationship, said Zulma Garcia, director of policy for the Rhode Island Coalition Against Domestic Violence. Women who call a domestic-abuse hot line sometimes are reluctant to leave an abuser for fear of what could happen to their cats or dogs, she said.

Lewiss' bill would extend similar protections to those afforded to human victims. Last year, Maine became the first state in the nation to pass such a law, and Vermont and New York followed. In addition to Rhode Island, lawmakers in California, Colorado, Massachusetts, Tennessee, Illinois, New Jersey, Washington

and Utah are considering similar bills.

"Abusers are harming animals, which is despicable and criminal to begin with, and by doing so they are continuing to abuse their original victim," Lewiss said. "Our courts simply cannot allow this to happen."

The old saying, "Pets are people, too," rings particularly true when a family is wracked by violence. This is a simple step to help protect both the victims of domestic violence and the animals they love.

**JEERS** to state Rep. William San Bento Jr. and his bill that would take slot machine revenues away from Newport, to punish the city for opposing Newport Grand's expansion.

San Bento, D-Pawtucket, doesn't like that the city rejected the gambling parlor's request to build an addition. He asked, "Why should we be giving them a portion of the take when they're blocking the business from expanding?"

The answer is that the city's share of revenues from the existing facility has nothing to do with whether it favors the expansion of that facility. San Bento is implying a kind of extortion: Let Newport Grand have its way or we'll take the money away. And it's no small amount of cash, either; last year, the city's 1 percent share of the slot proceeds amounted to \$772,900.

We have often said that government, on both the state and local levels, should not be dependent on money from gambling. However, as long as Newport Grand is here and paying taxes, the state has no right to take all that money and give none to the host city.

A Superior Court judge ruled against the city Friday, saying only the state has the right to regulate gambling facilities. That means the Newport Grand expansion probably will go forward. But San Bento's attempt to penalize Newport for trying to protect the integrity of its zoning ordinance is still wrong.